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Turner Says Leaks Top CIA Problem

Copley News Service

WASHINGTON — Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, says the danger of disclosing secrets is the No. 1 threat to U.S. intelligence operations.

Speaking before the National Press Club on Wednesday, Turner said allied intelligence services were losing confidence that the United States can keep a secret.

"We suspect that some are holding back information," he said. "One recently withdrew a proposal for a joint covert action which would have been beneficial to both nations. It did so when reminded that I must notify eight committees of the Congress of every covert action. They could not imagine that the plan would not leak."

The ICA chief also asserted that agents overseas who risk their lives to support the United States even though they are not American citizens ask when their names will appear in the press.

"This is not a transient problem," he said. "It is a trend that could undermine our human intelligence capabilities for a decade or more. In this kind of a climate there simply may be fewer volunteers to be sources for us in the future."

Turner said it has become very suspicious these days to even refer to withholding information in the name of national security.

"Abuse of this principle in the past, however, does not make it invalid today," he said. "Quite simply, there is information which it is not in the national interest to disclose.

He also referred to recent cases in which the CIA decided to argue against making sensitive information public so the Justice Department could prosecute persons believed to have engaged in significant wrongdoing.

"I hope you will recognize that when we balk, for instance, at disclosing all the secrets necessary to prosecute a case in court, we do not do so in an arbitrary manner," Turner said. "We study these cases very carefully. Moreover, we must be prepared to justify our positions not only to the attorney general, but to our (congressional) oversight committees."